

A NEW NAME IN SPERMACOCE FOR TWO SPECIES
OF BORRERIA FROM NEW GUINEA

OSIA GIDEON

THE BORRERIA-SPERMACOCE PROBLEM has recently been the subject of much discussion by some of the keenest students of the Rubiaceae. For the last century *Spermacoce* L. and *Borreria* G. F. W. Meyer have been maintained as separate genera. The only difference between the two is whether one or both valves of the capsule dehisce; their general facies are so similar that a specimen without mature fruits cannot usually be referred to the proper genus with any certainty. I am not sure that this character is either good or constant enough to justify generic separation. Although it sounds defensible on paper, it is difficult to see; worse still, it is absent without ripe fruits. Verdcourt (Kew Bull. **30**: 301. 1975) reunited *Borreria* with *Spermacoce* and gave an excellent explanation of the problem in support of this viewpoint. Interested readers should refer to his paper. Since *Spermacoce* sensu lato (including *Borreria* as a section) is readily identifiable, I prefer this view and will treat New Guinea species accordingly. Fosberg (pers. comm.) has for many years (even before Verdcourt's reduction of *Borreria*) been using *Spermacoce* in its broad sense.

Merrill and Perry described two species of *Borreria* from New Guinea, *B. linearis* Merr. & Perry and *B. lanceolata* Merr. & Perry. These species, with bilocular capsules and both valves opening from the top to expose the seeds, undoubtedly belong to *Borreria* (= sect. BORRERIA (G. F. W. Meyer) Verdcourt). The main characters used to distinguish these two taxa were the erect habit of *B. lanceolata*, its lanceolate leaves, and its slightly larger flowers with corolla lobes definitely pubescent above. Study of numerous subsequent collections has shown that these distinctions are unreliable, and that a single variable taxon is represented. The habit of *Brass* 11737 (the type of *B. lanceolata*) is not recorded on the field label; the specimen, with many long, rather slender stems branching near ground level, does not suggest an erect plant. The usual habit is decumbent to low spreading. The leaves vary little in shape: in *Brass* 4067 (the type of *B. linearis*) many leaves have dried with the margins strongly curved, but some have remained flat and are distinctly lanceolate. Most leaves have short, stiff hairs along the midrib beneath, as well as on the margin (particularly near the apex). *Brass* 11737 is the only collection that has no pubescence on the leaves. Flower size is rather variable and cannot be regarded as a reliable character. I have found no flowers in which the upper surfaces of the corolla lobes are glabrous. The seeds, although variable in size, are very uniform in appearance. In the absence of reliable distinctive characters, it seems wise to unite the two species under one name in *Spermacoce*. Although I have

seen only the isotypes (from BRI), Mr. E. Henty, who has seen the holotypes, has kindly passed his notes on to me.

The specific epithets *linearis* and *lanceolata* cannot be used in *Spermacoce* due to the existence of several earlier names (*S. linearis* HBK. Nov. Gen. Sp. 343. 1818; *S. lanceolata* Link, Enum. Hort. Berol. 1: 132. 1821; *S. lanceolata* Frank ex Presl, Bot. Bemerk. 86. 1844) that would make them later homonyms. It is therefore a pleasure to name the taxon after Dr. Leonard Brass, who collected the types of the original taxa. *Brass 4067* is here retained as the holotype since it is more representative of the species.

***Spermacoce brassii* Gideon, nom. nov.**

Borreria linearis Merr. & Perry, Jour. Arnold Arb. 26: 34. 1945. TYPE: [Papua New Guinea, Central District,] E of Mt. Tafa, 2350 m, *Brass 4067* (holotype, A; isotype, BRI).

Borreria lanceolata Merr. & Perry, Jour. Arnold Arb. 26: 35. 1945. TYPE: [Indonesia, Irian Barat,] Balim River, *Brass 11737* (holotype, A; isotype, BRI).

DISTRIBUTION. New Guinea: along the central cordillera from Wissel Lakes (Irian Barat) to Mt. Donana (Milne Bay District), and the Saruwaged Range; 1300–3000 m alt.

DIVISION OF BOTANY

OFFICE OF FORESTS, DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRY

P. O. BOX 314

LAE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA